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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MCAP](#) [MARR](#) [FR](#) [GG](#) [RU](#)
SUBJECT: RUSSIA/GEORGIA: FRENCH PRESIDENCY OFFICIAL SEEKS
U.S. HELP TO GUIDE GEORGIA TO A MORE CONSTRUCTIVE POSITION

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY POL/MC KATHLEEN ALLEGRONE FOR
REASONS 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) During a December 16 meeting with Pol MC, French Presidency (Elysee) advisor for Russia and the Americas Damien Loras asked for our assistance dealing with Georgia. Per Loras, President Sarkozy used the coming end of the French EU presidency to write to Russian President Medvedev in early December to summarize the current situation regarding the Russia-Georgia crisis and to outline what still needs to be done. The letter focused on three areas: conflict prevention, the status of Perevi, and the Geneva process. On conflict prevention, Sarkozy urged developing a mechanism that could be used to prevent new incidents from occurring and to defuse them before they can occur. Regarding the standoff in Perevi, Sarkozy proposed a Russian withdrawal, the return of Georgian police, and the insertion of EU observers. On the Geneva process, Sarkozy said that there had been some initial positive steps but asserted it was necessary to continue the discussions in the Geneva format to secure a more lasting solution. Sarkozy was motivated, according to Loras, to cement progress to date but also to reinforce the need for Russia to comply with its existing commitments and to keep Russia engaged in the Geneva talks. French FM Kouchner followed up Sarkozy's letter with a more detailed letter to FM Lavrov that also strongly reminded the Russians that it is not acceptable to leave an increased number of Russian troops in the enclaves.

12. (C) The French were pleased that three days after the letters were sent, Russian troops appeared to be withdrawing from Perevi. As the Russian withdrawal was nearing its end, however, and the EU 27 ambassadors were visiting the area to witness these developments and to mark the introduction of EU monitors, the Georgian government surprised everyone by arriving on site with sixty military troops. Both the Georgian troops and the Russians adopted a very tense posture. Almost immediately, the Russians responded by installing not regular troops but Special Forces troops, or "spetsnaz." Loras clarified that the Georgians are well aware of the deal Sarkozy had proposed to the Russians and that the intervention of their troops) rather than the arrival of civilian police -- had been intentional and counterproductive. France believes that the Russian military had been reluctant to leave the Perevi area and had started to do so only because the political side of the house had required it. Now, with the failure of the initiative, the military hardliners appear again to be in the ascendancy. (Note: According to Embassy Tbilisi's "Tbilisi Update" from December 15, the OSCE reported that Georgian and Russian forces agreed before the December 11-12 withdrawal of Russian troops that a small number of Georgian Interior Ministry criminal police would re-enter Perevi after the Russians left. The first Georgian forces to arrive in Perevi on December 12 were criminal police, but early on December 13, an additional 50-60 Interior Ministry specialforces troops arrived in unmarked vehicles, for an estimated total of 90-100 Georgian personnel. Russian forces claimed to the OSCE that the Georgian side had sent in 500 troops, including military forces, and consequently sent their own forces back

into Perevi. For several hours during the day on December 13, Georgian and Russian forces each had a presence in Perevi within a few hundred yards of each other. Georgian forces originally withdrew, so that by the evening of December 13, the location of the two sides was essentially the same as it had been before the Russian withdrawal. We assume this was the incident to which Loras referred. End Note)

¶3. (C) Loras said Medvedev has not yet responded to Sarkozy's initial letter. The French are concerned that the answer might come in advance of this week's meeting of the Geneva group, laden with unacceptable conditions and demands.

If that occurs, the Elysee has instructed EU Special Envoy Morel to reject the conditions, and Sarkozy is poised to send Medvedev a letter reinforcing the terms of the earlier agreements and outlining the need for Russia to participate constructively in the Geneva process. Failure to do so, Loras said, would have to call into question Russia's commitment to the agreement and the continuing role of the EU monitors, an observation Sarkozy would mention in any letter he might send to Medvedev.

¶4. (C) Loras said the French believe Saakashvili is playing an unhelpful and provocative role because of his weakened domestic posture. They would like our help in guiding him toward a more constructive role. Discussing Russian leadership views, Loras said it appears that Putin is once again playing a strong and unhelpful role. Loras judged Medvedev's role to be uncertain -- it is not clear whether he is taking a harder line because he has been perceived as too prone to settle issues or whether that is his normal style. In any case, Sarkozy remains committed to preserving the gains made through the August and September agreements, continuing and advancing the Geneva process and enhancing the role of the EU monitoring mission.

¶5. (C) Comment: Loras used a pre-arranged meeting to raise this issue and to make a plea for assistance in working with Saakashvili. Sarkozy obviously wants a positive legacy from his intervention in Georgia and believes that is only possible if a dialogue on the future of the enclaves remains on the table in Geneva. From what Loras said, it also seems that Sarkozy is unwilling to allow EU monitors to be sidelined and marginalized. Sarkozy has proven himself in other situations willing to cut deals with leaders he does not fully trust, but has also been tough minded in holding them to bargains they have struck, as he did with Syrian President Asad last year. We look forward to any reporting from Geneva or elsewhere that can shed light on developments as well as guidance on a reply to the Elysee. We will also check with the MFA for further details on Sarkozy's letter to Medvedev, e.g., whether it included reminders of Russia's obligation to withdraw from Akhalkalaki and Upper Kodori.

STAPLETON